

## Sūrah Muzzammil

### Central Theme and Relationship with the Previous *Sūrah*

This *sūrah* and the one following it – *Sūrah Muddaththir* – are very similar to one another. The same mood pervades them and together they form a pair. Most exegetes regard them to be very early Makkan *sūrahs*. However, a deliberation on their contents reveals that they were revealed at the time when the opposition of the affluent among the Quraysh to the call of Islam had reached such an extent that the Prophet (sws) would continuously remain worried and thoughtful on this situation.

It is hard to imagine the sorrow and distress of a person who has become a target of allegations and sarcasm from everyone in his surroundings even though he had been deputed by the Almighty to reform these very surroundings. In these circumstances, it is but natural for him to prefer seclusion and isolation from others. When he stands up, he covers himself with his shawl; when he walks, he wraps himself in it; when he sits, he seeks its refuge and when he lies down, he hides himself in it. The reason for this is that it is only his shawl which affords him the opportunity to immerse himself deep into his soul and it is through his shawl that he gets comfort and satisfaction in seeking the nearness of God.

Every person who is vigilant in his responsibilities towards His Creator and fellow brethren has some experience of what is stated above. However, the matter of the prophets of God is totally different. They are very affectionate and caring towards their fellow human beings and are very sensitive regarding the responsibilities imposed on them by their Creator. When, in spite of their tremendous struggle and efforts for reformation, they see that the animosity of people is only increasing, they think that perhaps they themselves are at fault. This augments their worries. The effect of this is that instead of assuring themselves by blaming others they isolate and seclude themselves in order to find a solution to this state of affairs. In this mental state, they feel that their shawl is their greatest sympathizer hiding in which they can detach themselves from their surroundings.

A person enshrouded in his shawl is called مُرْمَلٌ. By addressing the Prophet (sws) in this manner, the Almighty has portrayed this thoughtful nature of the Prophet (sws). It is a very affectionate address. By

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addressing him in such an affectionate manner, he is guided to the way which will relieve him of this sorrow and sadness, and instil in him the strength and determination essential to counter the circumstances he is facing and will be facing in future. In other words, through this *sūrah*, the Prophet (sws) is also encouraged and inspired so that he is able to defy the adverse circumstances he is facing. He is simultaneously informed of a very effective method which will lift his spirits and provide him with determination.

### Analysis of the Discourse

**Section I (Verses 1-14):** The Prophet (sws) is directed to regularly offer the *tahajjud* prayer by night and to recite the Qur'ān in it in slow measured tones. This shall soothe and strengthen his mind and soul and enable him to bear the heavy burden of his responsibilities that shall be entrusted to him during the course of his mission of prophethood. In the day time also, there is an opportunity for him to glorify the praises of his Lord; so he should keep in remembrance the name of his Lord and seek refuge in His mercy; He is the Lord of the East and the West and so the Prophet (sws) should entrust all his matters to Him. With patience should he ignore the nonsensical acts of his enemies and leave their matter to God, Who is enough to take them to account.

**Section II (Verses 15-19):** The Quraysh are warned that just as the Almighty had sent the Prophet Moses (sws) to the Pharaoh to bear witness to the truth before him, He has also sent towards them a Prophet. They should keep in mind the fate of the Pharaoh and his nation and that if they also adopt the attitude the Pharaoh had adopted, their fate will be no different. They should remember the Day whose horror will make children grey-haired – the Day with whose burden the sky will cleave asunder. The Qur'ān is an admonition which is meant to remind people of this great event. Therefore, he who wants his own well-being should remain on the right path; otherwise he should get ready to face dire consequences.

**Section III (Verse 20):** The last verse of this *sūrah* was revealed in Madīnah. In it, the directives of the *tahajjud* prayer mentioned at the beginning of the *sūrah* have been modified – being reduced in their extent. However, with this reduction, certain other alternatives have been suggested to compensate for it which will be helpful in protecting the real purpose and are in accordance with the new circumstances which have arisen.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَرْمُلُ (١) قُمْ اللَّيْلَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (٢) نِصْفَهُ أَوْ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا (٣) أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ  
وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا (٤) إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا (٥) إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْئًا  
وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلًا (٦) إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا (٧) وَادْكُرْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا (٨)  
رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَّخِذْهُ وَكِيلًا (٩) وَاصْبِرْ عَلَى مَا يَقُولُونَ وَاهْجُرْهُمْ  
هَجْرًا جَمِيلًا (١٠) وَذُرْنِي وَالْمُكَذِّبِينَ أُولِيَ النَّعْمَةِ وَمَهِّلْهُمْ قَلِيلًا (١١) إِنَّ لَدَيْنَا أَنْكَالًا  
وَجَحِيمًا (١٢) وَطَعَامًا ذَا غُصَّةٍ وَعَذَابًا أَلِيمًا (١٣) يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَكَانَتْ  
الْجِبَالُ كَثِيبًا مَهِيلًا (١٤) إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ رَسُولًا شَاهِدًا عَلَيْكُمْ كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ  
رَسُولًا (١٥) فَعَصَى فِرْعَوْنَ الرَّسُولَ فَأَخَذْنَاهُ أَخَذًا وَبِيلًا (١٦) فَكَيْفَ تَتَّقُونَ إِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ  
يَوْمًا يَجْعَلُ الْوِلْدَانَ شِيبًا (١٧) السَّمَاءُ مُنْفَطِرٌ بِهِ كَانَ وَعْدُهُ مَفْعُولًا (١٨) إِنَّ هَذِهِ تَذْكِرَةٌ  
فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَى رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا (١٩) إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَى مِنْ ثُلُثِي اللَّيْلِ وَنِصْفَهُ  
وثلثه وطائفة من الذين معك والله يُقَدِّرُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ عَلِمَ أَنْ لَنْ تُحْصَوْهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ  
فَأَقْرَأُوا مَا تيسَّرَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ عَلِمَ أَنْ سَيَكُونُ مِنْكُمْ مَرْضَى وَآخَرُونَ يَضْرِبُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ  
يَبْتَغُونَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَآخَرُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَأَقْرَأُوا مَا تيسَّرَ مِنْهُ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ  
وَاتُّوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُوَ  
خَيْرًا وَأَعْظَمَ أَجْرًا وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (٢٠)

In the name of Allah, the Most-Gracious, the Ever-Merciful.

O ye enfolded in the shawl! Stand by night, but a little. Half the night, or decrease it a little or increase it a little more and recite the Qur'ān in a slow measured tone. Soon We shall lay on you the burden of a heavy word. Indeed, this rising by night is very suitable for the heart's resolve and for the comprehension of speech. During the daytime also, you have a lot of time for glorifying the Almighty and remember the name of your Lord and devote yourself entirely to Him. He only is the Lord of the East and the West. There is no god but He. Therefore, take Him alone as your Guardian, and bear with patience what they say and with dignity ignore them. And leave the matter of these rejecters who enjoy the comforts of life to Me and give them a little respite. We have in store for them fetters and the fire of Hell and choking food and a very painful torment. On the

Day when the earth and the mountains shall tremble and the mountains shall be as if they are disbanding heaps of sand. (1-14)

To you people We have sent forth a Messenger as a witness upon you just as We sent a Messenger to the Pharaoh. Then the Pharaoh disobeyed this Messenger; so We seized him in a dreadful manner. So how then will you, if you also deny, save yourself from the Day which shall make the children old. The sky is ripping apart with its burden and the promise of God is certain to be fulfilled. This is a reminder. So whoever wants, he can take the path of His Lord. (15-19)

Your Lord, indeed, knows that you stand about two-thirds of the night or half or one-third of it, and so does a group among your Companions. And God alone appoints the day and night in due measure. He knew that you would not be able to follow this. So He turned towards you mercifully. Recite then from this Qur'ān as much as you are able to. He knows that there are those among you who will be sick and others who will be travelling to seek the bounty of God and others who will be fighting for the cause of God; recite then from this as much as is possible for you, and diligently adhere to the prayer and pay *zakāh* and lend to God a befitting loan. And whatever good you send forth for yourselves, you shall find it with God better than before and greater in reward. And keep seeking God's forgiveness: Indeed, God is Most-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful. (20)

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَرْمَلُ<sup>1</sup>

The words in which the Prophet (sws) is addressed in this verse reflect his inner state at the time of revelation of this *sūrah*.

The word *مَرْمَلُ* is actually *مُرْمَلُ* and the letter ت has been assimilated into ز. Similar, is the case with the word *مُدْتَرٍ*. It refers to a person who has enwrapped himself in his shawl. Such generally is the situation of a person who is worried because of the circumstances he is facing and is also disgruntled with the people around him. The Prophet (sws) was warning people of the punishment which was looming over them; however, these people were so indifferent and averse to this message that they would pounce on the Prophet (sws) and regard his sympathy and anxiety to be mere madness, what to speak of listening to this message. In such circumstances, it was but natural for the Prophet (sws) to remain worried and thoughtful, and in this state of anxiety, a person's greatest sympathizer is his shawl, as indicated earlier. He can just wrap himself in it whenever he wants and dissociate from his fellow brethren and associate more closely with his Creator. It also needs to be kept in

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1. O ye enfolded in the shawl!

consideration that a shawl was an essential part of the Arabic dress of those times, and the Prophet (sws) would also keep a shawl with him.

It is evident from various narratives that even before being called to prophethood, the Prophet (sws) was earnestly searching for the truth. He would remain secluded in a very similar manner as described in this verse until he was shown the light by the Almighty, as is referred to in Sūrah Duḥā. Later these same feelings overcame him when he personally experienced the aversion of his sick nation to its medicine and its animosity towards its healer. The word مُرْمَلٌ is pointing to the feelings of the Prophet (sws) which he experienced in this state.

Some of our exegetes are of the opinion that the Prophet (sws) has been addressed in this manner because he was sleeping while enwrapped in his shawl and this verse directed him to get up and stand in prayer before his Lord. This interpretation is interesting because it seems to be in harmony with subsequent verses; however, in my opinion, this view is incorrect. Never in any phase of his life was the Prophet Muḥammad among people who would sleep without any worry enwrapped in a shawl. He would always sleep in a state of worry, and like the day a better part of his night would also be spent in worry and in remembering God. There is not a single verse in the Qur'ān which in any manner insinuates that the Prophet (sws) was ever admonished for being indifferent to God. Quite contrary to this, he has been often lovingly chided in the Qur'ān for burdening himself with much more than what was required of him by the Almighty. However, we do find in the Qur'ān at various places a mention of his worry and anxiety when he began to encounter hardship in his preaching mission; in order to strengthen his resolve and to relieve him of his worries, on such instances he was advised to stand up in prayer, in particular the *tahajjud* prayer. In my opinion, the verse under discussion is one such instance.

فَمُ اللَّيْلِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (۲) نِصْفَهُ أَوْ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا (۳) أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا (۴)<sup>2</sup>

Mentioned in these verses is the way the Prophet (sws) should adopt to alleviate his worry and anxiety reflected in the word مُرْمَلٌ. In fact, when he was faced with worries in the cause of his preaching mission, the Qur'ān prescribed precisely the same remedy to him. I have tried as best as I could to explain the underlying wisdom in this. In this *sūrah*, since the effectiveness of the remedy and its value have been explained subsequently, I will content myself to merely explaining these verses. It

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2. Stand by night, but a little. Half the night, or decrease it a little or increase it a little more and recite the Qur'ān in a slow measured tone.

will *inshallāh* become evident from this the blessings which are concealed for a true believer if he offers the *tahajjud* prayer. It will also become clear how this prayer rejuvenates his energy and strengthens his faith and resolve.

In the verses *فُمُ اللَّيْلِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا نِصْفَهُ أَوْ انْقُصَ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ* night refers to the last half of the night when a person gets up after sleeping awhile. The subsequently mentioned expression *نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ* refers to this. It is this time for the *tahajjud* prayer which is evident from the practice of the Prophet (sws) and is also very apt for the objective it has been prescribed. This time period can be equal to half the night and it can also be lesser than it or a little more. It is very difficult to wake up in the later part of the night and there is always the possibility that one is not able to get up at the right time; for this reason, some latitude has been given with regard to the time span so that this may reduce any hardship. Although it is evident from the words of the Qur'ān that standing in prayer for half of the night is more blessed than other time span; however, there is a possibility of slight variation in this.

In the expression *وَرَتَّلْ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا*, we are informed of the right way of reading the Qur'ān in this prayer: it should be read in a slow measured tone. Consequently, it is evident from various narratives that the Prophet (sws) would read the Qur'ān with a melodious and tuneful voice and would stop at each verse. At times, he would repeat a single verse many times, overcome with emotion. Moreover, he would seek refuge with the Almighty on verses which would depict punishment and torment and express gratitude on verses which would depict mercy. As an immediate compliance to some verses which would implicitly or explicitly ask him to prostrate, he would bow down in prostration.

It is this way of recital which is in accordance with the guidance of God and is also recorded in Prophetic narratives. Moreover, it is this very way which could be of benefit vis-a-vis the purpose of revelation of the Qur'ān. However, this way of reading the Qur'ān only remained in currency so long as people regarded it to be a Book worthy of reflection and deliberation and a source of guidance for their life. Later, when Qur'ānic recital became only a means of gathering reward for one's own self or transferring the reward of the recital to a departed soul, it came to be read in the manner it is being read by our memorizers in the *tarāwīḥ* and the *shabānah* prayers.

إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا (٥)<sup>3</sup>

Mentioned in these words is the great objective for which the Prophet (sws) was directed to stand up in prayer by night. It is in preparation for and as an initial training to bear the burden of a heavy word that he was asked to do this. Our exegetes differ in ascertaining what this heavy word refers to. My mentor Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī regards it to mean the responsibility of open warning (*indhār ‘ām*) mentioned in Sūrah Muddaththir in the following words: يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُدَّثِّرُ قُمْ فَأَنْذِرْ (١٧٤: ١-٢) (O ye enfolded in the shawl! Arise and warn people, (74:1-2)). I also would endorse this view because it was after this phase of delivering open warning that the phases of acquittal (*barā’ah*), migration (*hijrah*) and war (*qitāl*) ensued. These which were the toughest phases of the life of the Prophet (sws) in which both he and his companions passed through such severe tests that one shudders merely on imagining them.

It is evident from this discussion that the Prophet (sws) was directed to stand in the *tahajjud* prayer to prepare for the great *jihād* which he and his companions were about to face in their struggle for the establishment of Islam. It is this distinctive feature of the struggle which distinguishes it from all other movements. Before other material means are provided for it, it is essential that its participants have a true comprehension of God, a strong faith, an unshakable resolve and complete trust and conviction in the Almighty. The sole method to achieve these traits is the prayer – in fact the *tahajjud* prayer on the condition that it is offered the way we have been directed to offer it. It is on this bedrock that the struggle for the establishment of Islam rests. If the edifice of religion is raised without this foundation, then it will collapse even before it comes into being.

إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْئًا وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلًا (٦)<sup>4</sup>

In these verses, the Prophet (sws) is informed of the underlying reason and wisdom for being directed to stand in prayer by night.

The word نَاشِئَةُ is from the verb نَشَأُ meaning “to get up”. Like عَاقِبَةٌ, and غَافِيَةٌ it is a verbal noun. The expression نَاشِئَةُ اللَّيْلِ would mean “standing up by night”. It is evident from this word that the time of *tahajjud* begins after a person gets up from sleep which is the later part of the night. It is indeed very difficult to get up at this time since one’s sleep is dearest to one at this time; however, if a person is able to overcome this trial, then no

3. Soon We shall lay on you the burden of a heavy word.

4. Indeed, this rising by night is very suitable for the heart’s resolve and for the comprehension of speech.

time is more favourable for him to remember God and to understand His Book. A person who is blessed by the Almighty with the urge to get up at this blessed time is indeed very fortunate: firstly, he finds in himself the power and strength to overcome his base desires which become instrumental in making him capable of reforming and rehabilitating his soul; secondly, the Almighty Who is the Creator of night and day has reserved this time for sending down His blessings and favours and the doors to these blessings are opened for those who value it and come to the presence of God to ask for His mercy and blessings.

The expression أَشَدُّ وَطْئًا portrays the effects of getting up at night for the prayer: when a person gets up from his bed and after making ablutions stands up in prayer, he finds his feet are firmly grounded; this actually refers to the complete devotion of the mind, peace of the heart and vigilance of the intellect. If a person has a worried mind and a heart devoid of peace, his feet do not strongly hold ground. In this state, he is not able to carry out the smallest of tasks what to speak of big ones. In other words, by this expression, one gets to know of the inner-self of a person through his outer-self. Some exegetes have taken it to mean that getting up in the night is a means of fully trampling one's soul. Although this interpretation is linguistically possible, later verses are not in harmony with it. My interpretation has also been adopted by other exegetes; however, they have not alluded to the fact that feet being firmly grounded actually refers to the devotion and resolve of the heart and mind.

The expression وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلًا implies that since this time is specifically suited for the mind's peace and heart's attentiveness, whatever comes out of one's tongue touches the right strings of the heart and is readily received by one's intellect. A person accepts it as if it was the call of his own heart and for other listeners too its effect is very profound and most desirable. It is evident from various narratives and other indications that the incident of the jinn hearing the Qur'ān mentioned in Sūrah Jinn took place when the Prophet (sws) was reading it in the *tahajjud* prayer; they were so deeply moved by it that they not only embraced faith but also started calling others to this Book. The great caliph 'Umar (rta) too embraced faith when he once heard the Qur'ān. It is evident from these details that reading the Qur'ān in the *tahajjud* prayer according to the way taught by God is not only beneficial for the inner purification and training of the person himself but also at times is beneficial in reviving others whether they are from men or from the jinn.



إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا (٧)<sup>5</sup>

Generally people are of the opinion that this verse tells the Prophet (sws) that he has a lot of other work to do during the day. In other words, the verse says that since in the daytime the Prophet (sws) is hard pressed for time due to work and other involvements and hence seldom finds time to pray with full concentration, he should be very diligent in offering the *tahajjud* prayer in the night.

Although it is linguistically possible to interpret the word in this meaning, for various reasons I am not convinced with this interpretation.

Firstly, the Almighty has not selected the time of the *tahajjud* prayer to be the later part of the night because in the daytime a person has many other involvements; on the contrary, it is evident from many indications in the Qur'ān that in the twenty four hours of day and night, it is this specific time due to its nature that is the most appropriate for attaining the objectives to be achieved by standing in prayer by night.

Secondly, if this meaning was to be conveyed from the verse, then it could have been simply done so by the words *إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ شَغْلًا كَثِيرًا* or other ones having a similar meaning. The word *سَبَحَ* does mean “to swim” and “to walk”; however, it is not commonly used to mean “to be involved and to be busy” unless of course there is a strong intrinsic or extrinsic indication for this.

Thirdly, if the word had this meaning, then it would be more appropriate that its qualifying adjective should have been *كَثِيرًا* or *كَبِيرًا* instead of being *طَوِيلًا*.

For these reasons, I am unable to convince myself of the conventional interpretation. In my opinion, the word *تَسْبِيح* here is in its common meaning of glorifying the Almighty and the meaning of the verse is that besides the *tahajjud* prayer which the Prophet must offer at night, during the day also he has a lot of time for glorifying the Almighty which he should do. Consequently, it is known that the Prophet (sws) would diligently try to remember the Almighty in the daytime too while walking, sitting, eating and carrying out other routines of life. It is for this very reason that before embarking on every small or big life-routine, supplications offered by him have been reported down to us. If a person diligently adheres to these supplications, he will remember God at every step he takes and, with their blessing, undertakings which are seemingly of worldly nature become worship.

It also needs to be noted that what is required in religion is continual

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5. During the daytime also, you have a lot of time for glorifying the Almighty.

remembrance of God. I have already elaborated on this aspect at some place in this *tafsīr*. Just as for the material life of man, breathing is essential, for his spiritual life, remembering God is essential. The body dies if breathing stops. Similarly, if a person becomes indifferent to God, his soul becomes lifeless. It is God's remembrance that keeps it fresh and alive, and the life of the heart is real life.

It also needs to be kept in consideration that calling people towards religion, and reflecting on the signs of God present in the world within man and those without, are also included in remembering the Almighty. I have explained this aspect at more than one place in this *tafsīr*. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this reflection is the most superior form of remembering God because it is through reflection that remembrance becomes really meaningful. In the absence of reflection, remembrance becomes merely an exercise of the tongue, and is not beneficial to the life of a person. I have already alluded to this aspect under the following verse of Sūrah Al-i 'Imrān: *الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ* (those who remember God when standing, sitting, and lying down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying: "Lord! You have not created this in vain. Glory be to You! Save us from the torment of the Fire, (3:191). Readers can look up its *tafsīr*.

وَاذْكُرْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا (٨)

Both *تَبَتَّلْ* and *تَبْتِيلًا* mean devoting oneself entirely to God. It involves isolating oneself from people and seeking refuge with God's mercy. In this verse, the Prophet (sws) has been told how to cope with his distress at seeing people shunning the truth and at being hurt by them: on such occasions, he should cut himself off from people who do not value the truth and seek refuge with the mercy of his Lord. For this purpose, the only thing that is required is to remember His name. When he does so, the Almighty will Himself enshroud him in His mercy.

It needs to be kept in mind that all names of God reflect His attributes, and it is on these attributes that the edifice of religion and faith stands. If a person keeps fresh a true knowledge of these attributes, he would find himself being backed by such a large army that the army of Satan would appear trivial before him. He would find himself to be firmer than mountains. On the other hand, if a person does not have a true comprehension of divine attributes or this comprehension becomes

weak, then his belief will become baseless or weak. As a result, he will find every outbreak of lightning striking his own shelter.

رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَّخِذْهُ وَكِيلًا (٩)<sup>7</sup>

The implication of this verse is that God's refuge is not weak and frail; it is the refuge of the God of the East and the West. No one is god except Him so that no one is His partner and so that no one can cause hindrance in the implementation of His intentions. If the Prophet (sws) makes Him his guardian, He will suffice, as is also mentioned in (٨١:٤) وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ وَكِيلًا.

وَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَاهْجُرْهُمْ هَجْرًا جَمِيلًا (١٠)<sup>8</sup>

The Prophet (sws) is directed in this verse to be patient on the vain talk of his opponents and to strongly adhere to his view. He should neither be sorrowful at what they say nor get after them too much; he should just ignore them in a dignified manner for they themselves will bear the consequences of this attitude.

Leaving someone alone can be done in two ways: one is to leave him alone after humiliating and cursing him with the intention of animosity and revenge. This is what is generally adopted by people who are slaves to this world. The righteous and the pious never adopt this attitude. Their efforts to reform their fellow brethren is not because they have some personal interest in this; they do this for the guidance of the people and to please their Lord. If people harass or disregard them, then instead of being angry and showing hate, they feel sad on their state of affairs and sorrowful at the terrible fate these people will meet. In this situation, they might ignore and leave alone their people, but this leaving alone is much like the leaving alone of a father of his disobedient son. It is this leaving alone which is called هَجْرًا جَمِيلًا in this verse. Such abandoning is very beneficial at times. Those who have even a small trace of goodness in them are moved by this decent behaviour and are led into analyzing their own demeanour. At least they realize that the person will never accept their evil stance come what may. As long as a prophet remains among his people, he faces the excesses of his people with such dignified patience. However, when the Almighty decides to punish these people, the prophet announces his acquittal from them and dissociates from them. This dissociation is a prelude to their destruction.

7. He only is the Lord of the East and the West. There is no god but He. Therefore, take Him alone as your Guardian.

8. And bear with patience what they say and with dignity ignore them.

وَذَرْنِي وَالْمُكَذِّبِينَ أُولِيَ النَّعْمَةِ وَمَهَلْهُمْ قَلِيلًا (١١)<sup>9</sup>

In this verse, the Almighty has very sternly warned the rejecters by addressing the Prophet (sws). The implication is that the Almighty will really make an example out of them.

The style of the expression *وَذَرْنِي وَالْمُكَذِّبِينَ* is reflective of the fact that the Prophet (sws) should just isolate himself from these rejecters and let the Almighty alone take care of them; he does not need to do anything.

Concealed in this verse is also the message that if there is a delay in the destruction of these disbelievers, it is because the Prophet (sws) is still among them. As per a divine practice, as long as a prophet is among his people, they are not punished. If the prophet leaves them, they will be immediately annihilated. It is the misfortune of these oppressive people that they want to harm him, for it is he who is actually shielding them from the wrath of God. If they deprive themselves of this shield, who will save them from torment and affliction?

The expression *أُولِيَ النَّعْمَةِ* refers to rich and affluent people. The word *نَعْمَةٌ* means “riches and affluence”. By citing this attribute of the disbelievers, the purpose is to bring to light the real reason of their denial and to censure them on their ingratitude. The implication is that if the Almighty had blessed them with wealth and affluence, they should have been grateful to Him; on the contrary, this God-given affluence made them arrogant and haughty and they rose against their Lord.

إِنَّ لَدَيْنَا أَنْكَالًا وَجَحِيمًا (١٢) وَطَعَامًا ذَا غُصَّةٍ وَعَذَابًا أَلِيمًا (١٣)<sup>10</sup>

The implication of this verse is that if the God-given affluence has led them to haughtiness and rejection of the prophet, then they should remember that in the Hereafter they will be chained in fetters and thrown into Hell.

The word *أَنْكَالٌ* is a plural of *نَكْلٌ*. It means “fetters” as well as “bridles of iron”. At other instances (eg. 76:4), the words used are *سَلَاسِلٌ* and *أَغْلَالٌ*.

The expression *وَطَعَامًا ذَا غُصَّةٍ* refers to the fact that if these people do not realize the obligation they owe because of the copious food and resources they have been blessed with, they should remember that in the Hereafter they will be given food that will get stuck in their gullets, and, instead of a blissful life, they will have to encounter a painful doom.

9. And leave the matter of these rejecters who enjoy the comforts of life to Me and give them a little respite.

10. We have in store for them fetters and the fire of Hell and choking food and a very painful torment.

يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَكَانَتْ الْجِبَالُ كَثِيبًا مَهِيلًا (١٤)<sup>11</sup>

This is a reminder of the Day when these conceited people will face what is depicted in the verse. The earth and mountains will reel and shake in such a manner that even mountains will become like disbanding heaps of sand what to speak of the houses and palaces of the affluent.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ رَسُولًا شَاهِدًا عَلَيْكُمْ كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ رَسُولًا (١٥) فَعَصَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ الرَّسُولَ فَأَخَذْنَاهُ أَخْذًا وَبِيلًا (١٦)<sup>12</sup>

After giving the Prophet (sws) the necessary instructions, in these verses the Quraysh are admonished that just as the Almighty had sent a Messenger to the Pharaoh, He has sent a Messenger to them. The purpose of sending a Messenger to them was to inform them of God's directives and the ways to please Him, the reward they will earn in this world and in the Hereafter if they follow these directives and the fate they will meet if they show disobedience. The implication is that they must fully comprehend the status and position of the person they are rejecting and humiliating and must know the consequences of such an attitude. He is not merely a person who asks people to accept his message or a mere preacher whose message can be treated in any way; in fact, the Almighty has sent him to them as a witness to the truth. Thus through him a judgement shall be passed regarding what is right and what is wrong. This judgement will be the one which was passed between Moses (sws) and the Pharaoh. Just as the Pharaoh was seized by the Almighty for disobeying the prophet, and seized in a manner that he could find no refuge anywhere, similarly they too will be seized by Him and seized in a manner that no one will be able to free them from His clasp.

I have fully explained the meanings of شَاهِدًا عَلَيْكُمْ under the following verse of Sūrah Baqarah: لَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا (١٤٣:٢) (so that you be witnesses [to the truth] before the people, and the *rasūl* be such a witness before you, (2:143). Readers can look up the *tafsīr* of this verse.

11. On the Day when the earth and the mountains shall tremble and the mountains shall be as if they are disbanding heaps of sand.

12. To you people We have sent forth a Messenger a witness upon you just as We sent a Messenger to the Pharaoh. Then the Pharaoh disobeyed this Messenger; so We seized him in a dreadful manner.

فَكَيْفَ تَتَّقُونَ إِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ يَوْمًا يَجْعَلُ الْوِلْدَانَ شِيبًا (١٧)<sup>13</sup>

The implication of this verse is that if the Quraysh are not being seized, then they should not think that they will never be seized. Even if this does not take place in this world, the next world is certain to come and they should contemplate its horrific nature; if they deny the Prophet (sws), how will they save themselves from the Day which will make the children old. This is actually an expression of the intensity and all-embracing nature of something horrific. We often say: "That sorrow has made me grow old." It is recorded in certain narratives that the Prophet (sws) is reported to have said: *شيبتي هود وأخواتها* (Sūrah Hūd and *sūrahs* similar to it have made me grow old).<sup>14</sup> Arab poets have used this idiom in various styles, and is so common that parallels need not be cited. Zamakhsharī has furnished some examples which can be relied upon.

السَّمَاءُ مُنْقَطِرٌ بِهِ كَانَ وَعْدُهُ مَفْعُولًا (١٨)<sup>15</sup>

The Day of Judgement should not be regarded as far-fetched. The sky is heavily laden with its burden. It might tear apart and the Day of Judgement appear from within it while they are still in their state of ignorance and indifference. This topic is discussed in the following verse of Sūrah A'rāf thus:

ثَقُلَتْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا تَأْتِيكُمُ إِلَّا بَغْتَةً (١٨٧:٧)

The heavens and the earth are burdened with it. It will come upon you suddenly. (7:187)

In other words, the Hereafter does not require any evidence. Though the time of its advent is known to no one except the Almighty, its signs are as evident in the heavens and the earth as the pregnancy of a lady in its last stage. No one can tell when she will deliver; however, everyone who sees her knows that she will deliver. In a similar manner, the signs of the Day of Judgement are obvious and the sky is about to cleave asunder with their burden; it can come anytime. Unfortunate are people who are indifferent to it merely because its exact time of arrival is not

13. So how then will you, if you also deny, save yourself from the Day which shall make the children old.

14 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., vol. 3 (al-Yamāmah: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1987), 368.

15. The sky is ripping apart with its burden and the promise of God is certain to be fulfilled.

known to them.

إِنَّ هَذِهِ تَذْكِرَةٌ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا (١٩)<sup>16</sup>

The demonstrative pronoun “this” refers to those verses of the Qur’ān which have been conveyed to the Quraysh to remind them of the Hereafter. In other words, before sending punishment, it was essential that they be warned and admonished. So the Almighty by sending His prophet left the Quraysh with no excuse because the truth was communicated to them in its ultimate form. It was now the responsibility of the people. He who wanted could adopt the path leading to his Lord and in this manner become worthy of His pleasure and mercy and he who wanted could remain in error and also see his fate. The Almighty has no concern for him.

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَىٰ مِنْ ثُلُثَيِ اللَّيْلِ وَنُصْفَهُ وَثُلُثَهُ وَطَائِفَةٌ مِنَ الَّذِينَ مَعَكَ وَاللَّهُ يُقَدِّرُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ عَلِمَ أَنْ لَنْ تُحْصَوْهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ عَلِمَ أَنْ سَيَكُونُ مِنْكُمْ مَرْضَىٰ وَآخَرُونَ يَضْرِبُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَبْتَغُونَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَآخَرُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا لِأَنفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُوَ خَيْرًا وَأَعْظَمَ أَجْرًا وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (٢٠)<sup>17</sup>

This is the last verse of this *sūrah*. It is evident from its subject that it was revealed in Madīnah; however, it relates to the directive given to the Prophet (sws) about the *tahajjud* prayer right at the beginning of the *sūrah*. For this reason, it was placed at the end of this *sūrah* so that one is able to understand the relationship between the initial and final directives

16. This is a reminder. So whoever wants, he can take the path of His Lord.

17. Your Lord, indeed, knows that you stand about two-thirds of the night or half or one-third of it, and so does a group among your companions. And Allah alone appoints the day and night in due measure. He knew that you would not be able to follow this. So He turned towards you mercifully. Recite then from this Qur’ān as much as you are able to. He knows that there are among you who will be sick and others who will be travelling to seek the bounty of Allah and others who will be fighting for the cause of Allah; recite then from this as much as is possible for you, and diligently adhere to the prayer and pay *zakāh* and lend to Allah a befitting loan. And whatever good you send forth for yourselves, you shall find it with Allah better than before and greater in reward. And keep seeking Allah’s forgiveness: Indeed Allah is Most-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful.

given in this regard. Several examples of this kind have been seen in earlier *sūrahs*, and this is a very obvious corroboration of the fact that verses in a *sūrah* are placed in harmony with the meanings they signify, and that all this arrangement and placement was made under the guidance of God and His Prophet (sws).

In the sentence إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَىٰ مِنْ ثُلُثَيِ اللَّيْلِ وَنِصْفَهُ وَثُلُثَهُ the Prophet (sws) is lauded for the fact that he was very befittingly fulfilling the directive of standing in prayer by night which the Almighty knows full well. The implication is that these endeavours of his are in the knowledge of God, and when this is so they will not go waste; he will be greatly rewarded for them.

After expressing praise for the Prophet (sws), the next part of the verse: وَطَائِفَةٌ مِّنَ الَّذِينَ مَعَكَ expresses praise for the Companions who in their fervour to follow him adopted the *tahajjud* prayer as a mandatory practice of their own accord. This directive was specifically related to the Prophet (sws) as is evident from its wording; however, the Companions would leap to do every deed they would see the Prophet (sws) do. Although the real requirement of faith in the Prophet (sws) is to follow him in each and every step he takes, there is a world of difference between power of endurance of a prophet and that of common people. For this reason, the Almighty altered this directive for common Muslims. The next section of the verse describes this change. The reason of course being that its burden not exceed their power of endurance.

The next section of the verse: وَاللَّهُ يُقَدِّرُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ عَلِيمٌ أَن لَّنْ نَّحْضُوهُ فِتَابٌ عَلَيْكُمْ says that it is the Almighty who sets the measure of night and day. It is only He who knows their requirements and demands and the various aspects with regard to which they affect life. It is also He alone who knows which of these are needed by man and the circumstances and difficulties through which he has to pass. In the light of His knowledge, His verdict is that the Companions will not be able to stand up in prayer for half the night or one third or two thirds of the night; hence they should stand up in prayer to read the Qur'ān as much as they are able to.

I have already explained the meaning of the expression فِتَابٌ عَلَيْكُمْ in an earlier *sūrah*. When the verb تَابَ comes with the preposition عَلَى, it means “to turn to someone graciously”.

Though the words فَاقرءوا مَا تيسر من القرآن are general in style yet since they are mentioned with relation to standing in prayer by night, they refer to reading the Qur'ān in the *tahajjud* prayer. Although reciting the Qur'ān in itself is an act that entails many rewards, however, reading it in a measured tone in the *tahajjud* prayer brings the blessings for which



the Prophet (sws) has been so emphatically asked to adopt this practice.

It is evident from this discussion that this relief was given to common Muslims because they would not have been able to abide by this taxing directive. As far as the Prophet (sws) himself was concerned, he abided by this directive till his very last breath. For a common Muslim, this prayer is still an optional act which earns great rewards, and the extent of time in which he should stand in this prayer has been left to his vigour and zeal.

The next part of the verse: عَلِمَ أَنْ سَيَكُونُ مِنْكُمْ مَرْضَىٰ وَآخَرُونَ يَضْرِبُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ يَبْتَغُونَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَآخَرُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ refers to every journey which is undertaken for a noble and higher cause whether it is for seeking knowledge or for offering the *hajj* or for doing business. For trade journeys, this expression is used many times in the Qur'ān.

The words وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا informs us of how to compensate for not being able to pray the *tahajjud*; if people are not able to fully benefit from the blessings of this prayer, they should be vigilant in the five prayers as much as possible, and spend their money for the cause of God, which includes spending it for the supremacy of the word of God and for emergency needs related to religion and state.

The expression وَأَقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا can refer to all types of generous spending for the cause of God; however, when it is mentioned with *zakāh* it refers to the spending which is done for the requirements of war or for some emergency need.

The words وَمَا تَقَدَّمُوا لَأَنْفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُوَ خَيْرٌ وَأَعْظَمَ أَجْرًا urge the believers to spend in the way of God: they are told that this spending will not be for others; it will, in fact, benefit their own selves. It will accumulate in their own accounts with God, and they will find it in a very beneficial form when they go to their Lord. The implication is that this spending is not an unprofitable undertaking; it is the most profitable of trades.

The words وَأَسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ refer to the fact that besides diligently doing what is mentioned above, believers should continue to seek forgiveness from their Lord for their sins and blemishes, and hope that He will forgive them. He is Most-Forgiving and Ever-Merciful.

With the grace of God, I come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*. I pray that He forgive my sins and make hearts receptive to the truth. وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْمَوْفِقُ لِلصَّوَابِ (It is He who produces the urge in a person for the truth).

Raḥmānābād,

7<sup>th</sup> November, 1978 AD

5<sup>th</sup> Dhū al-Ḥajj, 1398 AH